

**Lewiston Tribune, Sunday, Dec. 31, 2006 – Editorial by Jim Fisher**

## **No caretaker, Risch leaves his stamp on Capitol**

When many Idahoans look back on Jim Risch's short term as governor, they will remember his activity. In seven months, the man who returns to the lieutenant governor's post with the new year has taken on more things than some other governors have in years.

When people who watch state government closely think of the Risch administration, though, they will remember something else: Competence.

Some observers already have compared Republican Risch favorably to former Govs. Cecil Andrus and Bob Smylie. Like Democrat Andrus and Republican Smylie, Risch demonstrated that his primary objective was not the honor of the governor's position. It was to do things. And from the day he succeeded Dirk Kempthorne, appointed to President Bush's Cabinet as secretary of interior, Risch has tackled one issue after another.

More important, he has succeeded. Consider just a partial list:

He protected the state from vulnerability to new coal-fired energy plants, and the mercury and other toxins they emit, by withdrawing the state from a federal pollution trading program.

He called legislators to Boise for a one-day special session to abolish a statewide property tax levy for school maintenance and operations while replacing it with an extra penny in sales tax, answering residents' calls for property tax relief.

He sought and received U.S. Department of Agriculture approval for a plan to manage roadless federal forest land in Idaho, a plan that surprised and pleased environmentalists with its balance of development and conservation.

He diagnosed a severe nursing shortage in the state and prescribed additional training at two new buildings for the purpose, one at Lewis-Clark State College in Lewiston and another at the College of Southern Idaho in Twin Falls. In addition, he advised voters to turn back an overreaching initiative limiting local land-use planning, endorsed two collaborative federal bills combining new wilderness areas with land freed for other uses and patched up tottering relations with the state's Indian tribes.

He also discontinued Kempthorne's shady practice of packing appointed boards and commissions with Republicans by getting some to declare themselves independents, making them eligible for seats legally reserved for members of other parties. That move, and some of his appointments within his administration, left many Democrats admitting he was making needed improvements.

In these things and more, Risch has succeeded where other chief executives might have failed. He has shown that his years in legislative and Republican Party leadership left him with the ability to make things happen. He has also left a record against which his successor, Butch Otter, will be measured. And he, and Otter, both know it. -- J.F.